APPENDIX F
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GILS records are an early innovation in the use of metadata in the networked environment to describe and point to selected information objects (whether or not those objects were available electronically). GILS has not been the only Federal initiative concerned with metadata. For example, the Federal Geographic Standards Committee (FGDC) worked for several years to develop a metadata standard that would include appropriate elements for describing geospatially-referenced information (Mangan, 1995). The efforts of GILS and FGDC, however, were simply the precursor to activities by others in the networked environment to devise a way of describing network–accessible objects (whether documents, images, multi-media objects, etc.) so that they could be discovered, identified, and accessed (see for example the work on the Dublin Core metadata elements in Weibel, et al., 1995) .

One of the meanings of the term metadata in GILS refers to the actual set of data elements that comprise a GILS record. Thus, the terms "metadata record" and "GILS record" are interchangeable, or, more explicitly, GILS records are metadata records. The data elements defined for use in GILS records constitute a metadata scheme. The scheme includes specific names of elements, definitions for the elements, and their structure. The GILS elements provide a standardized way of representing information objects—whether they be online or not, a low or high level of aggregation, etc.

The term metadata can also refer to the "locators" that GILS records may describe; GILS records may describe information resources that contain metadata records. For example, if there is a GILS record for an index or catalog of agency publications, that catalog may be considered "metadata" in the sense that entries in the catalog provide data about and serve as pointers to information resources.

Descriptive metadata contained in GILS records are a foundation for several processes that include discovering, locating, and accessing information. Users can make initial relevance judgments about a resource simply by examining the metadata record that describes the resource. Standardized data elements and content in the record can improve search and retrieval. GILS records can be also support machine-processing such as done by Web robots.